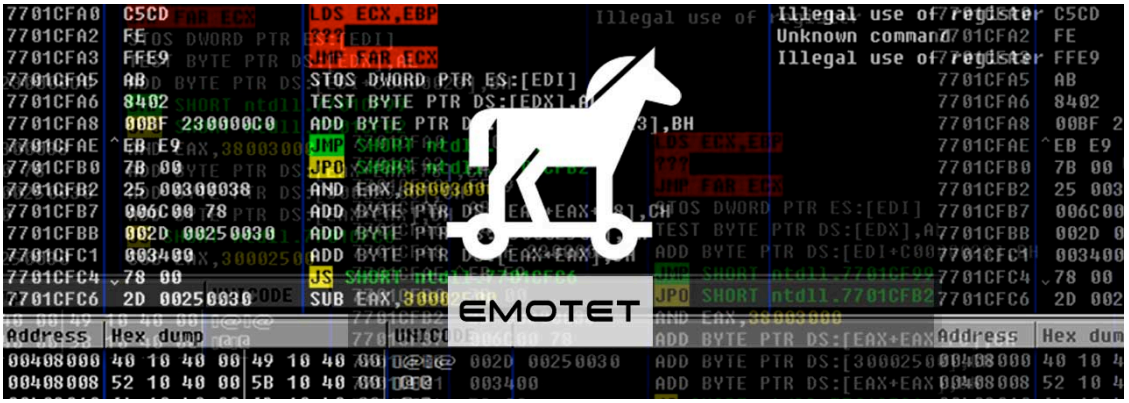
Emotet botnet is now heavily spreading QakBot malware

By Ionut Ilascu

Published: 2020-07-21 · Archived: 2026-04-05 14:39:01 UTC

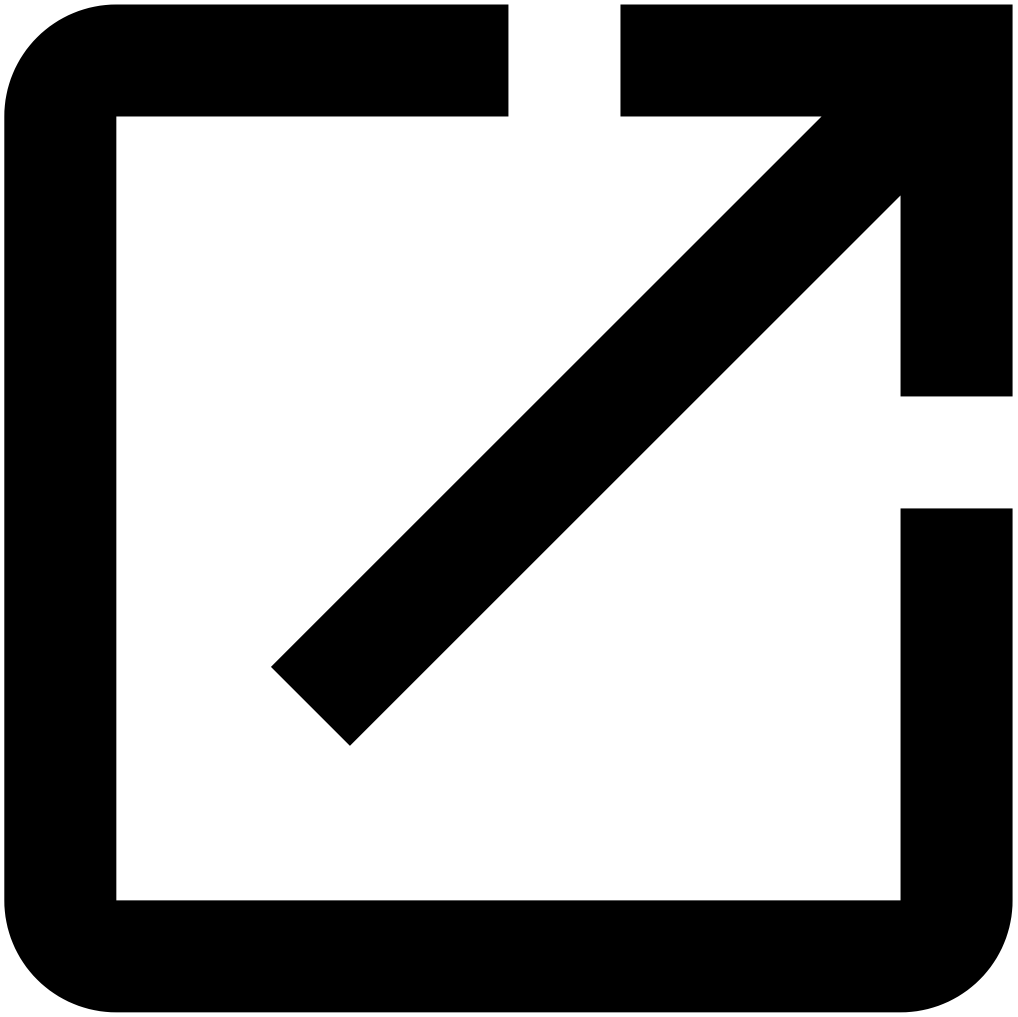


Researchers tracking Emotet botnet noticed that the malware started to push QakBot banking trojan at an unusually high rate, replacing the longtime TrickBot payload.

Last week, Emotet came back to life after a break of more than five months. Starting yesterday, the malspam operation briefly began installing TrickBot on compromised Windows systems again.

Things changed today when researchers noticed that Emotet was dropping QakBot. A string in the malware indicates that this trojan is now the partner of choice for Emotet botnet.


DIE LINKE.
0:00



Full distribution

A group of researchers and system administrators united under the name Cryptolaemus to fight Emotet operations, saw today that the threat actor replaced TrickBot distribution across all epochs.

An Emotet epoch is a subgroup of the botnet running on a distinct infrastructure. Currently, there are three of them, each with separate command and control servers, distribution methods, and payloads.

Speaking to BleepingComputer, Cryptolaemus said that they saw QakBot distributed all across Emotet botnet, TrickBot being completely absent.

Security researcher Bom caught a QakBot (QBot) malware sample and fed it to the Any.Run interactive analysis tool. The results are available at this link. A list with the addresses for the command and control servers (C2) is available here.

Additional analysis from cybercrime intelligence company Intel 471 revealed that the string for identifying this QBot campaign is “partner01,” suggesting a strong connection between Emotet and these threat actors.

However, speculating on a fallout between Emotet and TrickBot is premature as the relation between the operators of these treats two is not exclusive. Cryptolaemus said that a change in the delivered payload has happened in the past and that the original duo is very likely to resume activity.

But this does not occur too often, though. For instance, Emotet was seen delivering QakBot last year.

TrickBot and QakBot are the preferred partners for Emotet. All three actors are part of the same Russian-speaking community and have been interacting for a long time.

It is unclear what QakBot drops on infected systems but some victims may get ransomware as a special delivery, ProLock in particular.

For updates on indicators of compromise and C2 addresses used in Emotet campaigns, you can follow the Cryptolaemus Twitter profile.

Even if there is a different payload, Emotet still relies on emails for malware distribution, with the threat delivered via a malicious document.

Source: https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/emotet-botnet-is-now-heavily-spreading-qakbot-malware/